**Malawi Africa RISING R4D Workshops Proceedings**





Ntcheu-14 August and Dedza- 15 August, 2014

# Overview and objectives of the workshop

Smallholder farmers in Malawi have traditionally grown diverse crops on their farms, in an effort to ensure meeting their subsistence food needs. Livestock integration, especially chickens and small ruminants, provides the much needed protein component. However, agricultural practices that are used by the majority of these farmers largely result in sub-optimal productivity even under favorable climatic conditions. One of the key challenges is related to identifying mechanisms for driving agricultural innovations that enhance productivity and competitiveness of the maize-based farming systems. Innovation systems approaches are thought to provide the necessary environment for knowledge generation, tailoring and sharing, and thus accelerating innovations among stakeholders implementing various projects with farming communities.

During August, 2013, the Africa RISING Malawi team initiated ‘Innovation Platforms’ – as they were then loosely referred to - in both Dedza and Ntcheu districts. Over the next 12 months, the understanding of the Research for Development (R4D) platforms as a core Africa RISING approach increased. It is in this context that we organized R4D platforms day workshops for both Dedza and Ntcheu districts

The objectives of the workshops were:

* To create increased awareness among stakeholders about the concept of R4D platforms in the context of Africa RISING and how this could facilitate accelerated learning and technology delivery to farmers
* To open dialogue among diverse stakeholders for addressing critical issues constraining smallholder farming in Malawi
* To share current experiences and lessons learnt through activities of the Africa RISING Project over the past 2 years
* To map out strategies and avenues for enhancing the participation of key economic players in R4D platforms to promote food security and livelihoods of smallholder communities

**Stakeholders involved and the workshop process**

The workshops were attended by 28 participants in Ntcheu district (Top Photo) and 24 participants for Dedza districts (Appendices A and B). Participants were drawn from non-governmental organizations operating in the two districts (World Vision, Concern Universal, LOMADEF), the District Commissioner’s office, and from Malawi Government ministries, with interests ranging from agriculture (crop and livestock), environment management, women and youth development and human nutrition.

R4D platform members were asked to introduce themselves, indicating their affiliation and special interests. After the introductions, the District Commissioners officially welcomed the participants and highlighted the critical role that research is supposed to play for the advancement of smallholder farmers in Malawi. Dr Chikowo then followed with a power point presentation, on Africa RISING project in general, and later highlighting the earlier Africa RISING efforts on the formation of R4D platforms in the districts and progress to date. Thereafter, the workshop sought to have a common understanding of R4D platforms among all stakeholders.

**Setting the scene: What are innovation systems?**

The basic concept of innovation systems approach in the agricultural context hinges on fostering effective partnerships for delivery of agricultural services and benefits to farmers among diverse stakeholders. Platform stakeholders are expected to actively participate in contributing their individual/institutional expertise in collectively developing solutions to address challenges in different production systems/value chains. Thus, this coalition of research and development actors has a shared vision and operational objective, but with each participating actor deriving their desired benefit in the process (win-win scenario). We sought to make these concepts clear to all participants.

 To make this possible, the workshops started by deliberations on the understanding by participants on innovation systems in general. Participants came up with the following ideas pertaining to innovations systems:

* Working together
* Communism and capitalism mixed!
* Creating new things
* Working across disciplines
* Experiments on farmer fields
* Marketing for profits
* Farmers using intercropping
* Farmers using fertilizers and good seed
* Policy makers listening to technocrats and then implementing as suggested
* Etc

At the end of the deliberations, we summarized the concept in three points, drawn from relevant literature:

1. ‘innovation platforms’ an organisational model for stimulating innovation and development
2. meaningful change happens in networks of interdependent actors, who cannot change if others do not simultaneously change
3. hence, innovation depends on different stakeholders (e.g. farmers and relevant parties in a value chain) adopting different practices in a more or less concerted manner – based on some kind of coordination, agreement and mutual expectation.

**Guiding discussion questions (in three groups)**

The workshops included group and plenary discussion sessions, to draw out what could be done to stimulate farmers to participate in agricultural technology uptake and improve their incomes. It was envisaged that the workshop would contribute to the identification of desired outcomes and set-out responsibilities and timelines for agreed plans and course of action. Three groups were constituted and the following questions were given to the groups for discussion

* How can R4D platforms work to innovate with farmers and stimulate farmers’ participation in agricultural technology uptake and improve their incomes?
* What are the necessary technical, institutional and policy ingredients that make things happen, and which are the members within the R4D platform that can efficiently deliver those links?
* Are there any potentially critical individuals or institutions that are not currently constituted in the R4D platforms?

The following scenario was presented to participants and discussed:

“A market is supposed to be a physical place that has specific requirements for a commodity in a specified time. The market (buyer) should be on the R4D platform, together with agro-dealers, who should supply inputs to farmers (fertilizers, seed, chemicals), the financial institution (e.g. a bank) should be there to lend money to farmers so that they can produce the commodity to meet the requirements of the market (in terms of both quantity and quality). A transporter may also be onboard to make sure that crop inputs reach the farmers in time and the produce is transported to the market. Policy makers are supposed to be present so that they can advocate for policy changes that ensure profitability for all actors in the value chain. This arrangement should result in all actors being better off than if actors had operated in a conventional business practice mode”

**Presentations by selected stakeholders (identifying possible synergies among actors)**

**Concern Universal**

* Concern Universal is implementing Local Development Support Programme (LDSP), Funded by Irish Aid.
* This is a six year project (July, 2009-June, 2015)
* The goal of the project is to contribute to poverty and vulnerability reduction through local development
* The major objectives for the project are enhanced capacity of local government to plan and provide effective services and Improved food and nutrition security, health, income and access to services
* LDSP works with poorest rural farming households through the local decentralisation structure (32000 h/holds)

The major focus areas are local government, food and nutrition security, agribusiness, health, HIV and AIDS, water and sanitation, disaster risk reduction, malaria, family planning and reproductive health, cross cutting issues (gender, environmental management, rights and participation and capacity building.

* The programme has 7 result areas (outputs)
* Two of Result areas for the project are improved delivery of malaria prevention and control, nutrition education and services, and reproductive health and family planning and Increased crop and livestock production and natural resources management in Chafumbwa EPA of Dedza district and Makwangwala in Ntcheu district (Central Region, Malawi)
* It is under these result areas that agriculture extension is vital
* The program has been using participatory approach through the district agriculture office and EPAs
* As the extension/farmer ratio is high 1/>3000 as of 2009, the program adopted the lead farmer extension approach. A total of 203 were identified and trained but currently on 156 are actively providing the service. Others migrated to other places for job seeking or marriage, others dropped out and others died
* Training of farmers on technologies promoted both for crops and livestock

**Challenges**

* High illiteracy levels of community members leading to poor understanding of the messages
* Interference of some traditional leaders in electing lead farmers leading to drop out after training
* Uncontrolled bush burning is affecting those technologies that require crop residues
* Local grazing of livestock destroying crops especially those cultivated under irrigation as livestock rom about everywhere
* Poor knowledge of formulating bye-laws coupled with lack of re-enforcement

**LOMADEF**

* LOMADEF is a registered local NGO that promotes organic farming and sustainable agricultural practices
* Works in Manjawira Extension Planning Area working with 2800 direct beneficiaries from 3 projects, and Nsipe Extension Planning Area working with 600 direct beneficiaries from 1 project
* Activities include Conservation Agriculture; irrigation, natural and artificial tree regenerations, compost manure making, bee keeping and promotion of Village Savings and Loans Association working with 40 Lead Farmers
* Train Lead Farmers in different projects disciplines
* Conduct Group Field Supervisory visits
* Conduct EPA Planning and Review meetings
* Share experiences on lessons learnt and best practices in district stakeholder meetings

**NTCHEU DISTRICT AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OFFICE**

**History of Extension in Malawi**

Extension in Malawi has under gone paradigm shift i.e

* Coercive approach
* Master farmer concept-progressive farmers identified and received extension & resources
* Achikumbe concept- outstanding farmers identified and rewarded
* Training and Visit (Block System)
* All the methods were top down- no farmer involvement, little interaction.
* This led to the development of the new extension policy in 2000, termed Agricultural Extension in the New Millennium: Towards Pluralistic and Demand-driven Services In Malawi

The New policy has been formulated against a background of a number of challenges in the agriculture Sector:

* Democratisation (societies opening up, demand services, rights)
* Market liberisation ( crops & livestock of their choice, FLS with less knowledge)
* Decentralisation-less capacity at district with increased demands)
* HIV/AIDS crisis-reduction in workforce
* Shrinking public sector resources –financial, human resource
* Public sector reforms- donor complaints about the size of public service
* Coordination- more players in agric but coordination is poor.
* Difficulty to assess extension impact-extension not put as a priority.
* High Malnutrition levels, low literacy levels and shrinking production

*How the Africa RISING R4D platform will help*

* Need for development of partnerships among service providers to provide and deliver high quality services for the benefit of all farmers in Malawi.
* Every stakeholder is encouraged to participate with district agriculture extension services (DAES) in working towards this vision.

**CADECOM (Catholic Development commission)**

* Project name: dedza cadecom g/nuts value chain development and nutrition project
* Duration : 3 year (2013 to 2015 with possible of extension)
* Areas of operation : 5 epas (chafumbwa, kanyama, bembeke, golomoti, mtakataka).
* Target : 30,000 farming families
* Donor :ftf - invc with funds from usaid.
* Program has registered 24,000 beneficiaries and distributed 144 t of groundnut seed. Farmers received training in harvesting and post harvest handling, drying, storage, aflatoxin management and on collective marketing. This is an ongoing activity. In addition 400 lead farmers trained in various technologies such as land preparation, spacing, planting, harvesting, drying, storage, aflatoxin management and marketing
* CADECOM formed 5 Farmer Associations one in each of the target EPA. These associations are receiving training in agribusiness

**Synthesis session**

At the end of the day, there was a plenary discussion to harmonize messages and approaches that are being used by different actors in the districts. Participants agreed on the following issues that ranged from R4D coordination and

* Coordination already in place through the DADOs who are the official conveners of the districts R4D platforms
* Need for cohesion between extension and researchers
* Government and NGO coordination enhanced through the R4D platform
* Lead farmers a good model for technology dissemination
* There was need to closely link farmers to markets
* Quality of seed on the market need to be supervised – farmers may end up buying inferior seed
* Pluralism by extension services (for all- not limited to a select few)
* Harmonizing messages/packaging
* What are the farmers’ demands and how is the coordination in response to the demands
* Joint planning, implementation and monitoring important
* Research products lagging behind in reaching farmers
* Resistance to adopting by farmers – is this true or technologies are not convincing enough/economics of farming at the smallholder scale
* Partnerships lead to innovation
* Increased dissemination activities for coming season (fields days, tours – 3 field days per season/per mother trial)
* Nutrition education important- should be targeted to more farmers. Include NGOs who are working on this (now part of R4D)
* Participation important (nothing for us without us)
* Strengthen DAESS structures – not fully utilized (reactive than proactive)
* Storage , processing and utilization
* Strategies to safeguard investments
* Learning/exchange visits between districts during 2014/15 cropping season
* R4D field tour early next year across the Africa RISING intervention sites (Dedza and Ntcheu) – the DADOS to coordinate as convenors of the R4D – Africa RISING to provide funding at the beginning. Other actors can build this in their future budgets

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| **Appendix A: Ntcheu district R4D platform participants** | | | |
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| **Appendices B**: Dedza R4D platform participants | | | | |
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